



## County of Los Angeles CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICE

Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration  
500 West Temple Street, Room 713, Los Angeles, California 90012  
(213) 974-1101  
<http://ceo.lacounty.gov>

WILLIAM T FUJIOKA  
Chief Executive Officer

Board of Supervisors  
GLORIA MOLINA  
First District

MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS  
Second District

ZEV YAROSLAVSKY  
Third District

DON KNABE  
Fourth District

MICHAEL D. ANTONOVICH  
Fifth District

July 11, 2011

To: Mayor Michael D. Antonovich  
Supervisor Gloria Molina  
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas  
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky  
Supervisor Don Knabe

From: William T Fujioka  
Chief Executive Officer

### STATUS REPORT – NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM'S AUTOMOBILE COLLECTION

On November 6, 2007, your Board approved the termination of the County Historic Automobile Collection Agreement with the Petersen Automotive Museum Foundation (Foundation), and ordered the Chief Executive Officer to report back to the Board on the Natural History Museum's (NHM) plans to assess the County-owned historic automotive vehicle collection (Collection) before any cars are sold, or proposed to be sold. On August 27, 2010, this office committed to reporting back to your Board at the end of the fiscal year with recommendations for de-accession. The purpose of the attached report from the NHM is to describe the recommended Automotive Management Plan, which includes:

- Alleviating the County's rental obligation of the Gardena facility, as the Foundation will take over the responsibility for housing the Collection in December 2012.
- Reducing the size of the Collection by approximately 25 percent through the de-accession of ten vehicles, loan of seven vehicles to other institutions, and incorporation of up to three vehicles in the NHM's new Los Angeles history exhibition.

*"To Enrich Lives Through Effective And Caring Service"*

**Please Conserve Paper – This Document and Copies are Two-Sided  
Intra-County Correspondence Sent Electronically Only**

Each Supervisor  
July 11, 2011  
Page 2

- Continuing to increase public access through the popular behind-the-scenes tours of the Collection (funds raised from the tours are used solely for the care and maintenance of the Collection).
- Hiring a new Collections Assistant, who will assist in the efforts to complete an assessment for each vehicle (conservation, preservation, and restoration).

If you have any questions or need further information, please contact me, or your staff may contact Robert Moran at (213) 974-1130, or via email at [rmoran@ceo.lacounty.gov](mailto:rmoran@ceo.lacounty.gov).

WTF:EFS:MKZ  
FC:RM:ib

Attachment

c: Executive Office, Board of Supervisors  
County Counsel  
Natural History Museum

**NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM  
AUTOMOTIVE MANAGEMENT PLAN**

**STATUS REPORT**

June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2011

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

I. Executive Summary

II. Public Access

III. County Collection Publicity and Marketing

IV. Collection Care Recommendations

V. Next Steps

VI. Conclusion

## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This report is the culmination of a series of challenging efforts the Natural History Museum has undertaken since the Petersen Automotive Museum requested the termination of the loan of the County's historic vehicle collection. Since then, the collection has been cleared of pests, re-housed in a new facility, had the vehicles' conditions stabilized, studied (both with outside experts and by the museum's staff) for long-term suitability for retention in the museum's history collection, and incorporated into the museum's programming. The report identifies how to further the museum's mission by preserving and conserving (but not restoring) those significant automobiles which either relate directly to the history of Los Angeles or California, or are particularly significant to Automotive history and are not well represented by original, unrestored representatives in other major museums.
- We are on track to alleviate the County's rental obligation at the end of the Gardena lease, December 2012, with the Foundation ready to then take over responsibility for the cost of housing the collection. As part of the consideration of the appropriate inclusion of the collection in the overall mission of the museum, the staff's recommendations for de-accession are here included on p 4. This is *phase 1* of staff recommendations to the County Board of Governors for de-accession of vehicles that our expert consultants and History Department staff did not consider to be essential to the NHM's mission. A second phase of de-accession will be undertaken once the current major Los Angeles history exhibition is completed next year. If the recommendations are accepted by the Board of Governors, the collection requiring storage will have been reduced by 19-20 items (approximately 26% of collection) through the sale or other disposition of 10 vehicles; loan of 7 others to other institutions, and incorporation of up to 3 vehicles in NHMs new Los Angeles history exhibition.
- Careful research produced the list of vehicles proposed for de-accession and a plan for housing and caring for the remaining collection. To de-accession any collection item staff needs to undertake a thorough review of its history and assess any legal restrictions. The proposed timeframe is for de-accession proposals to be reviewed by Board of Governors in September 2011, with dispositions completed by the end of June 2012.
- The Museum's effort to make the collection more accessible has been highly successful, as detailed on page 2. The return of the collection to the Museum's care also has allowed the staff to plan for the inclusion of important examples in Museum's Los Angeles history exhibit, the development of which has been the primary focus of the Museum's History staff over the past few years and which is scheduled to open next year.
- To continue and accelerate the progress made in the past year, the museum has recently filled a new position, History Collections Assistant, to help deal with improved storage of all history collections and to assist in the further implementation of the Automotive management plan.

## II. PUBLIC ACCESS

### Exhibition

- The History Department is considering six vehicles to be among the 2-3 to be incorporated into its new Los Angeles exhibit scheduled to open in December 2012. The selected pieces will illustrate how Angelenos used vehicles at work and play, as well as a means of transportation.
- NHM has received requests to borrow vehicles on both short and long term loans from local institutions in the past year. The Natural History Museum is working with these organizations to provide the requested vehicles and anticipates seven long-term loans of vehicles currently at the Gardena facility, as well as two others that will shortly be returned to the museum from other borrowers.
- In August 2010, NHM was invited to show its carefully-conserved original condition 1909 Pierce Great Arrow at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance, one of the world's most prestigious and competitive vintage car shows. Many thousands of people, car-enthusiasts from around the world, viewed the car and made positive comments to the NHM staff about it during the show. The Pierce won first place in the Preservation Class, as well as winning the Chairman's Trophy awarded to the most deserving car on the grounds. Funding for NHM's participation was underwritten by organizers of the event, with additional conservation costs provided by NHM.

### Touring

- In October, 2010, the NHM initiated special behind-the-scenes tours of the Gardena Automotive Facility. The tours have been extremely popular and have attracted wide media coverage, including in the *Los Angeles Times*, on local radio, and in *Westways* magazine. Tours are held twice a day on the first Friday of each month. Tickets have been sold out 4 to 6 months in advance, and plans are underway to add quarterly group tours for automotive clubs. Funds raised from these tours are used solely for the care and maintenance of the automotive collection.

### Research

- In the fall of 2010, key History Department staff was re-assigned to the planning team for the new Los Angeles exhibit at the Natural History Museum scheduled to open in December 2012. As a result, several History projects have been delayed, including the execution of the automotive collection's research plan. To help rectify this situation, a new position has been added to the History Department starting June 6, 2011. The new team member will enable the Department to complete the development and implementation of the research plan by December 2011.

### Special Events

- In October 2010, the Natural History Museum, at the request of its Fellows support group, hosted a sold-out special tour, followed by a talk and luncheon at the Gardena site. The History Department, in collaboration with NHM's Special Events section, considered using this as the model for rental events. However we determined that due to the short length of the current lease of the Gardena facility, it would not be financially worthwhile to promote the location for third party venues at this time.

### **III. COUNTY COLLECTION PUBLICITY AND MARKETING**

#### Website

- Once the Gardena Facility opened for tours (popularly called "Car-dena") the most frequently asked question was, "Do you have a list of your cars?" Researchers throughout the United States contacted us with the same question. In addition they requested serial numbers along with more specific body style information. To accommodate these inquiries, a thorough examination of each car was conducted. In response to this public demand this information will be provided for all the vehicles, instead of our original plan to highlight rotating information on 6 to 9 of the collection vehicles online. The new data base will be posted online in July 2011.

#### Publications

- An advertising rack card for "Car-dena" was produced in August 2010, promoting the collection and informing the general public how to book a tour of the facility.
- The second most frequent request received for the collection is for photographs of individual automobiles. These requests come from visitors, publishers, the media, other institutions, researchers, and NHM's own Marketing and Communications Department. The NHM is still seeking funding to professionally photograph the collection.
- Numerous print and electronic publications have printed articles on "Car-dena" since its opening. The greatest response came from an article in the Auto Club's *Westways* magazine.

## **IV. COLLECTION CARE RECOMMENDATIONS**

### Staffing

- The Natural History Museum has continued to engage two automotive specialists as needed to address the short term needs of the collection. In addition to cleaning, maintaining, moving and inspecting the collection, they were also instrumental in preparing the Pierce Great Arrow for its award-winning Pebble Beach display, and to gather the pertinent information on individual vehicles for the website. They will also be assisting in preparing vehicles for outgoing loans.
- The Natural History Museum's Conservation Department has completed preliminary conservation assessments of five vehicles, with six more scheduled over the next few months.
- Due to the immediate, overwhelming, and continuing response to the "Car-dena" tours, the History Department determined that additional tours and staff were imperative. The museum's Vice President of Research & Collections authorized funding for a new Collections Assistant position which was filled this month (June 2011). One of the major responsibilities of the new position will be to recruit and train docents to conduct tours and other volunteers to assist visitors and protect the vehicles during the behind-the-scenes tours.
- The new Collections Assistant, together with the Collections Manager and the two automotive specialists, will complete an initial assessment for each vehicle (conservation, preservation, restoration) by the end of this month. This will be followed by a more detailed plan that will be conducted in consultation with outside automotive experts.

### Recommended De-accessions

- The de-accession process involved staff research on each vehicle's past, records and relevance to the museum's mission, taking into account the expert opinions of the 7 consultants who gave their report to the Automotive Committee on the significance of each vehicle. Staff also must investigate the acquisition records for each car to see what the NHM legal obligations and potential donor restrictions were negotiated in acceptance of the vehicles in the County collections and clear any potential issues before de-accession can proceed. Staff's recommended list of vehicles for possible de-accession is presented to the Board of Governors, which has for the authority and responsibility to decide.
- The proposed timeframe is for de-accession proposals to be reviewed by Board of Governors, September 2011, with dispositions planned to be completed by the end of June 2012.



- Proceeds from cars sold at auction will be used to preserve or enhance the Museum's Automotive collection consistent with American Association of Museum guidelines for de-accession.

**1. 1951 Cadillac**

This car is noteworthy because of its single owner, actor Jack Oakie. Although largely original, it is not particularly significant from an automotive standpoint, and tells a limited California story. The City of Los Angeles Recreation and Parks Department has recently acquired the Oakie estate in Northridge, and preliminary discussions have taken place regarding the Oakie cars. The History Department's recommendation is to de-accession either for donation to the City of Los Angeles for display in its original garage at the Oakie estate or for sale at public auction.

**2. 1961 Cadillac**

This car was also owned by actor Jack Oakie. It is a rare short-deck model and a significant piece in the history of automotive design. Nonetheless, the History Department feels it would be better interpreted in the context of Jack Oakie's life at his Northridge home. Therefore, the History Department recommendation is to de-accession the vehicle either for donation to the City of Los Angeles Recreation and Parks Department or for sale at public auction.

Note: Preliminary contact has been made about the two Oakie vehicles but as with all vehicles where the recommendation includes consideration of transfer to another institution, more discussion is required after direction from the Board of Governors.

**3. 1929 Ford Model Coupe**

This vehicle was donated fully restored in 1988. Like its counterpart, the 1931 Ford Model A Roadster, this car is not unique to the Natural History Museum's collection or Southern California. The History Department recommends de-accessioning it for sale at public auction.

**4. 1931 Ford Model A Roadster**

This automobile was donated fully restored in 1991. Because this car is well-represented in other collections nationwide and has no significant California history, the History Department recommends de-accessioning it for sale at public auction.

**5. 1951 Kaiser Traveler**

According to the consultants engaged by the museum in the development of the Automotive Collection Management Plan, for this car to be exhibition it would require a restoration that would cost more than an already restored model could be purchased for today. Therefore, the History Department is recommending that it be de-accessioned for sale at public auction.

**6. 1900 Locomobile**

The Natural History Museum acquired this car in 1956, apparently in unrestored condition. It is believed to have been originally owned by Hyrum Silver of Salt Lake City and is reputedly the first car in Utah. In the 1980s, prior NHM curatorial staff disassembled the car and began to restore it. The restoration project was undertaken when the History Department had adequate staff, a fully equipped automotive shop but did not yet fully appreciate the historical importance of vehicles in unrestored original condition. The restoration was halted midway; since then the car parts have remained in bins. At the time the Petersen Automotive Museum became independent in 2000, transportation staff and automotive repair equipment were transferred to the new museum. As a result, the Locomobile's full restoration would have to be contracted out. Because the vehicle lacks a California connection, completion would not be a departmental priority. The Natural History Museum recommends that the 1900 Locomobile be de-accessioned either for donation to the Utah State Historical Society (assuming it is willing to pay for all packing and shipping costs), or for sale at public auction.

**7. 1907 Locomobile**

This car was donated in its present disassembled condition to the Natural History Museum in 1980. The donor had begun restoration, but then stopped the project. The History Department accepted the gift and planned to complete the restoration concurrently with its 1900 model, but the project was not finished. The History Department no longer has the capability or the desire to perform in-house restorations. For that reason and because of the lack of a California connection, we recommend de-accessioning for sale at public auction.

**8. 1927 McFarlan**

Although this vehicle is beautiful and extremely popular, it is a highly inaccurate restoration and is therefore of little historic significance. The History Department is recommending its de-accession for sale at public auction.

**9. 1963 Rolls Royce Silver Cloud III Sedan**

According to the automotive consultants (all of whom recommended retaining this vehicle) this is a somewhat rare Rolls-Royce model in magnificent condition. After much deliberation, however, the History Department does not see an interpretive use for this automobile beyond its history as a luxury vehicle that was once driven on the streets of Pasadena. The History Department recommends its de-accession for sale at public auction.

**10. 1929 Stutz Sedan**

This vehicle was donated to the Natural History Museum in its present partially restored condition at a time when the History Department had an in-house

operational restoration program. At that time the intention was for NHM to restore the automobile for exhibit. It is now is a complete but partially restored car, because of its lack of a California background and little technological or stylistic significance; it is unlikely to ever be a priority to complete the restoration. Because it has most of its original components, however, the History Department recommends its de-accession for sale at public auction.

- Staff believes the de-accession can be completed soon after the list is approved by the Board of Governors, and dispositions could be completed by the end of June 2012. By that time about 26% of the Natural History Museum's automobiles will have been moved out of the Gardena Facility with the first-phase de-accession of the above ten vehicles and the loan or display in the Museum's new Los Angeles gallery of approximately 10 additional vehicles.

## **V. NEXT STEPS**

History Department and Museum Operations staffs are currently exploring all options for consolidation of the history collections stored off-site in order to facilitate room for the pared-down Automotive collection. By constructing additional storage racking or temporary mezzanine flooring, we believe it will be possible integrate the combined collections in one facility, which would allow for reduced rental cost and improved collection management. The Foundation is committed to implementing this or another solution so that the County's current rental obligation will end when the current Gardena facility lease terminates.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

Although the Natural History Museum has always been aware that the County automobiles are one of its rarest collections, the past year has taken even its own experts by surprise. The public's overwhelming response not only to the vehicles themselves, but also to the intimate experience of a personally-guided behind-the-scenes peak at a museum collection, and to increasing information about the vehicles on the museum's website and other efforts, has been remarkable.

The "Car-dena" experiment has demonstrated that proper collections storage, conservation and publicity has an added side benefit; increased public access, not just for specialists, but for the general public, too.

The Natural History Museum's goal is to continue to move forward with the automotive collection, both in terms of care and access; the Automotive Management Plan will continue to serve as our guide.